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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 000824

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/03/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KINR](#) [KDEM](#) [HA](#)

SUBJECT: ANATOMY OF A DECISION: WHY PREVAL WENT WITH TI-BOB

REF: A. PAP 764

[B](#). PAP 701

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Recent discussions with President Preval's friends and advisors indicate that he selected Bob Manuel as his second Prime Ministerial candidate, following the rejection of Ericq Pierre by the Lower House, after being pressed by associates to dump the putative front runner, Planning Minister Jean-Max Bellerive. Other candidates disqualified themselves by lobbying too hard, thus irritating the stubborn president, or stating that they were not interested in the job. Manuel apparently played somewhat hard to get. Although Manuel's fate has yet to be decided, what we know about the process that led to his nomination says much about Preval - and the environment in which he operates. End Summary.

Introduction

[1](#)2. (C) Discussions with Rene Preval's intimates and close advisors during the past week have allowed us to piece together an outline of the process which saw Bob Manuel emerging as Preval's new Prime Ministerial nominee. Although the nomination's fate is still uncertain, the personalities, pressures and preoccupations that played into the president's decision-making process speak volumes about Rene Preval. It also highlights the dense skein of relationships and interests which shape all decisions here. Haiti's friends ignore these influences at their peril; they have tripped up many an outsider in the past.

Lining Up

[1](#)3. (C) Friends and close political associates tell us that Preval waffled about next steps following Parliament's rejection of IDB official Ericq Pierre as the Prime Minister candidate. Unsure whether to pick a technocrat or politico, Preval's short list included Minister of Plan Jean-Max Bellerive, Ministry of Agriculture Director General Jonas Gue, and Presidential Secretary General Fritz Longchamps. Other names, including Preval's former business partner and FOKAL Director Michelle Pierre-Louis, floated to the surface as well.

[1](#)4. (C) Jean-Max Bellerive appeared to have the upper hand after Pierre retired from the scene, but Preval remained reluctant to commit. He instead continued to canvass private sector and political party leaders on possible names. There were those around Preval who thought he leaned towards close friend and counselor Bob Manuel, but told us that Preval had dismissed the idea early on when key Senators advised him Manuel would not pass Parliament. Furthermore, Preval was not

convinced that the former State Secretary for Public Security had the economic experience for the job. He was also reluctant to put Manuel in the position of having to shill for votes with a parliament that distrusted him. Other candidates had drawbacks as well: Gue's blatant lobbying for the post, particularly following his trip to Venezuela, angered Preval. Michelle Pierre-Louis took herself out of the running, saying firmly that she wouldn't work for Preval. Bellerive, in many ways, appeared a the most attractive, experienced candidate.

With Friends Like These...

15. (C) Not everyone was convinced, however. Bellerive's candidacy disquieted Preval's close friends, business leaders Carl Braun and Edouard Bassan. Worried that a Bellerive candidacy would favor their business rivals, the Mevs family, Braun (Preval's single largest known financial contributor) intervened. He reminded the president of Bellerive's father's long service with the Mevs Company and apparently suggested that this would impact Bellerive's decision on future decisions relating to privatization of the ports. Braun/Bassan and the Mevs family are competing for this sale, should it go through. He further noted the current security environment demanded a strong law-and-order candidate. Although sources deny that Braun's pitch was so blatant, Bassan himself acknowledged that he and Braun were indeed uncomfortable with the Bellerive candidacy. He made pointed reference to the minister's close associations with Lavalas

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and, by extension, with Aristide.

16. (C) Bellerive's bid was further compromised by his close association with former PM Jacques-Edouard Alexis. The Preval/Alexis relationship had irretrievably collapsed under the weight of the Parliamentary vote of no-confidence in April and the two were not speaking. Preval believed reports that Bellerive had spread around money in parliament to stave off Alexis's first interpellation vote and attempted to block the second. Some parliamentarians spoke out against him as well. Too closely identified with Alexis, Preval saw the Planning Minister as a liability and privately told his colleagues that he didn't like being pushed towards Bellerive.

Pillow Talk?

17. (C) Closer to home, Preval's fiance lobbied hard for Manuel. Although Manuel had led the effort to move Elisabeth (Babette) Delatour out of the palace last Christmas when her presence was beginning to negatively impact the president, she opted to support him over the candidate backed by her former in-laws. Manuel himself told me, in some surprise, that he had Delatour's support. At the same time, Preval's closest friend, a Haitian-American living in New York, weighed in on Manuel's behalf. Bernard Fils-Aime, a close friend from the private sector counseled Preval that "you need a strong candidate, but you are going to have to give him independence and authority and trust." He added that choosing Manuel in the current security climate would send a strong message to Haitians.

Don't Count Your Chickens

18. (C) Preval found himself increasingly hemmed in by the Bellerive candidacy. With rumors flying that the Minister was a shoo-in, reports began to circulate that Bellerive had already made deals with members of Parliament and the political parties for Cabinet positions. Graffiti appeared on Port-au-Prince walls supporting the Planning Minister and press commentaries already had him in office. Preval balked,

offering the job to Manuel at some point on Saturday, May 24.

Playing Hard to Get?

¶9. (C) Manuel, however, played hard to get. Ti-Bob, as he is known to his intimates, has a long association with Preval but they have had a fraught relationship. Indeed, frustrated by the president's lack of support and his obsession with Delatour, Manuel quit the country in April of last year. He vowed not to return until the president gave him a serious job. Manuel stayed away for more than four months. He returned last fall on a sporadic basis but often traveled back to Guatemala City where his wife, a Guatemalan journalist, and their two young sons live. Currently serving as the president's security advisor, he plays many roles and recently involved himself in the efforts to finalize preparations for long-delayed Senatorial elections. During the past six months, he has privately expressed frustration with the President's tendency to prevaricate, telling me during the April riots that if Preval didn't get on the radio and quiet the crowds, his presidency was over. Mercurial, hard-headed and voluble, Manuel is one of the few people who can tell Rene Preval no - if he wants to.

¶10. (C) But was Bob Manuel truly reluctant? Although he repeatedly told us that he had no desire for a political post, others report that Manuel used the ten days between Pierre's fall and the nomination announcement to cultivate key members of the Parliament and burnish his credentials with Lespwa, Preval's political platform. He finally said yes to Preval Saturday night, after getting the go-ahead from his wife. But there were conditions to his acceptance of the offer. According to palace sources, Manuel told the President that he expected him to help him sell his candidacy to Parliament. He also asked for independence in selecting his cabinet and agreed to set up a council of economic advisors. It remains to be seen whether Preval will meet these conditions.

'Round Midnight

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¶11. (C) With Manuel still pondering the offer, Preval met with representatives of political parties, civil society and the private sector through the weekend of May 24-26. Many left those meetings as late as Sunday morning with the impression that Bellerive was the intended candidate. The Minister certainly thought so, telling us that he continued to work on his nominating papers through the day. However, shortly before midnight on Sunday, May 25, as most of Haiti slept, the official announcement nominating Robert Manuel as prime minister was made. It is unclear whether Preval let Bellerive know in advance.

SANDERSON